

CQ, November 16, 2007

A bipartisan, bicameral select committee on earmark reform would be established and a temporary moratorium on earmarks imposed under legislation unveiled Thursday by a group of House Republican appropriators.

The measure, to be introduced by Jack Kingston, R-Ga., has 70 Republican cosponsors according to GOP aides, including, with Kingston, 14 of the 29 Republican members of the Appropriations Committee.

It was put together by a smaller set of GOP appropriators led by Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va. Known as the “Wolf Pack,” they have been meeting for several weeks to come up with a plan for overhauling the way earmarks for member projects are developed.

Under their proposal, the leaders of each party in each chamber would assign four members to the select committee, which would have six months to review earmark proposals and report back to the House and Senate. During that period, earmarks would be banned from appropriation, authorization and tax measures.

“The American public doesn’t trust Congress to do its job, as we have seen in the recent opinion polls, and earmarks are front and center in giving Congress a bad name,” Wolf said.

#### Redistribution Sought

The effort appears to be designed to preserve earmarks by restructuring the way they are defined and distributed.

The appropriators were joined at a Thursday press conference by members of the conservative Republican Study Committee, who have often battled them over spending priorities.

“I’m not sure there’s any reform that goes far enough for us,” said RSC Chairman Jeb Hensarling, R-Texas. But he called the appropriators’ call for reform a “dramatic day” and threw his support behind the plan.

Republicans said they had not sought support from Democrats but predicted that political pressure would mount for action.

“I believe that we will get Democrats, but I believe we will get them through the force of market politics,” Kingston said. “I believe that they will react to this.”

The select committee would be charged specifically with studying a series of existing rules and new proposals, including current House and Senate disclosure standards; requiring transparency throughout the legislative process; allowing members to offer amendments to strike earmarks at all stages of the process; examining what lawmakers call executive branch earmarks; and establishing new categories of earmarks for projects of national scope, military projects and local projects.

The measure stipulates that no recommendation can be made unless the majority of committee members from each chamber agree to it, a provision that would ensure a measure of bipartisanship in any formal recommendations.

Though the “Wolf Pack” secured the support of nearly half of the 29 Republican appropriators, most of the senior GOP members of the committee, including top Republican Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., have not signed on. In addition to Kingston and Wolf, the other cosponsors from the committee are Zach Wamp of Tennessee; John Carter, Kay Granger and John Culberson of Texas; Ander Crenshaw and Dave Weldon of Florida; Virgil H. Goode Jr., of Virginia; Mark Steven Kirk and Ray LaHood of Illinois; Denny Rehberg of Montana; Robert B. Aderholt of Alabama; and Todd Tiahrt of Kansas. Former Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., is also a cosponsor, according to Republican aides.